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PANEL 7

THE BALANCE BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS IN THE UNDERGRADUATE INFORMATION SYSTEMS CURRICULUM

Panel Chair: Adolph I. Katz, Fairfield University

Panelists: William Amadio, Rider College
Robert L. DeMichiell, Fairfield University
David M. Kroenke, Consultant
Bruce J. Rogow, Gartner Group, Inc.

It seems clear that, with the recent changes in Information Technology and the restructuring of businesses to survive in a more competitive environment, there needs to be serious consideration of the Information Systems curriculum.

Information systems is an applied discipline. We are not interested in information technology for technology's sake, but rather in the ways that information technology can be used to increase the productivity of organizations and the people who work in them. To make effective applications, we must understand both the tools (the technology) and the applications (the needs of organizations).

Community college and technical school programs will train operations personnel and maintenance programmers. Computer science undergraduates, with additional systems software training by hardware vendors, will become the systems programmers. Should we educate information systems undergraduate students to handle the bread-and-butter applications programming jobs?

Recruiters will pay extra for graduates who understand the business, can solve problems and are well versed in computer hardware, software, programming and telecommunications technologies. Providing this technology base would be our unique "value-added" contribution to the business school program since other business school disciplines graduate students who know how to use productivity software to solve problems in accounting, finance, and marketing.

Third-generation programming, DBMS, 4GL, and CASE technologies, knowledge engineering, object-oriented programming, systems modeling, systems development and management, and networks are some specific skills that can be mastered by students in the four-year undergraduate program. Depending upon local conditions, requirements, and constraints, these topics should dominate the undergraduate information systems major, thereby giving the student a specific foundation upon which to build reasonable professionalism.

Some educators, however, argue that it is not necessary to educate more "techies." The goal for undergraduate information systems education is to produce responsible professionals who will continue to learn beyond the end of their formal education and allow new experiences to expand and mature their expertise. It is, therefore, more important for information systems graduates to understand information as a resource, to recognize the strategic implications of information in the organization, and to be able to develop corporate information policy. To achieve these objectives, our priority must be to expand the role of information resource management, organizational behavior, and strategic planning in the undergraduate information systems curriculum.

The panelists will present their positions with respect to the proper balance between technology and business and address such questions as:

- What is the goal of the undergraduate information systems curriculum?
- Are undergraduate students sufficiently mature to understand issues such as the strategic implications of information and the development of corporate information systems policy?
- What skills do business, government, and industry expect from information systems undergraduates tomorrow?
- What is a suitable paradigm for balancing technology and business needs in the curriculum?